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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 15, 2005

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TETON COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$4.1 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Teton County residents and businesses received \$4.1 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 7,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Teton County ranks number 38 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$575 for every man, woman and child residing in Teton County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Teton County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Teton County Commission Chairman Mark Trupp says, “To those who are using them, (these programs) mean a lot. The Food Stamps go to people who really need them, although there are a few who abuse them. The additional payments to the hospital help with programs and more money to operate those programs. And Medicaid keeps our indigent care program down.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$3.4 million on health care for residents of the county — \$900,000 more than a year ago. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Corner Drug in Driggs. “I think it’s very important. Without Medicaid it would be questionable whether we could make it or not,” says store owner Jim Hunter. “In a small community like this those dollars are of major importance. The vast majority of people in our area go to our store. Without our pharmacy, Medicaid folks and everyone else would have to go to Rexburg or Jackson Hole.”

The story is much the same at Teton Valley Hospital. In addition to inpatient and outpatient fees paid to for Medicaid client care, the hospital also received \$158,000 in extra payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits. The program compensates hospitals for low Medicaid reimbursement. The extra money can be used for any purpose so anyone using the hospital can potentially benefit from those dollars. All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$761,000.

Teton County residents received \$132,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families and another \$102,000 from the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. Food Stamp spending for county residents increased by \$36,000 in 2004 over the previous year. WIC spending increased by \$25,000.

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz adds, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Tracey Sessions at 528-5791 for more information.)

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<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**